

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis & Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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The Apter Publications: Mags or Rags?

You loved them as a kid. For what seemed like an eternity they provided you with the in depth coverage of professional wrestling you couldn't find anywhere else. When you wanted the truth behind what was going on in professional wrestling, they were your one stop source of information. You weren't always sure if they were giving you everything, but you thought they were giving you a lot. But the older and more knowledgeable you became about wrestling, the more you resented *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* and the other Bill Apter magazines.

For fans who became addicted to wrestling and found watching it on television wasn't enough, purchasing a magazine was a natural step. Fans wishing to read about wrestling would go to their local news stand and pickup an issue of *Inside Wrestling*, the magazine that claims to "rip the lid off pro wrestling," or *Wrestling Superstars* or the most popular Apter publication *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. These publications, owned by TV Sports Inc., but known to many as the Apter mags, are without a doubt the most widely read wrestling related publications in circulation.

TV Sports Inc. publishes four magazines and *WCW Magazine* each month. The company also publishes a weekly newsletter, two bimonthly magazines and two quarterly magazines. That's quite a bit of copy that has to be produced each month, but on a good day, a writer for the magazines can finish six to eight stories without ever making a single phone call. Although subscription levels have dropped in the past few years, even *Sports Review Wrestling*, the least read Apter magazine, has a monthly circulation rate of 30,000. To put things in perspective, that's about six times that of the most widely read underground newsletter. *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* sells between 75,000 and 150,000 copies a month, depending on who is featured on the cover.

Of course, most every hardcore fan realizes that what they read in these magazines is a work. The stories are pure fiction, as are most of the quotes, most of the letters to the editors, interviews and even some of the writers. Most wrestling fans who discover the newsletters quickly discard the magazines and actually become quite resentful that they were, at one time, duped into believing what they were reading. Most hardcores would be embarrassed to say they occasionally pick up a copy of an Apter mag. Some are very resentful that they were lied to by Apter for so long. Perhaps they feel justified, but given the nature of this sport, it should surprise no one that a group of magazines would capitalize upon and further perpetuate the angles and theater of professional wrestling.

The magazines, indeed, are more of a work than professional wrestling. These stories tend to border on the ridiculous and stretch the boundaries of believability for most fans. "Mascaras and Rhodes: Does Each Pray for the Other's Doom?" "Can the Ultimate Warrior Resist the Urge to Beat Up Sensational Sherri?" and "Does Jimmy Hart Own a Piece of Hulk Hogan?" are just a few of the articles you would have found in a typical issue over the past few years. These are also the same people that brought us Apartment Wrestling, Dr. Sidney Basil, the wrestling psychiatrist and Matt Brock, the veteran

wrestling writer who nearly died of a heart attack a few years ago. Distinguished? Maybe not. Credible? Doubtful. Creative? Certainly. Capitalist? No more so than the sport it covers.

For many fans, all of their knowledge about wrestling comes from television and these magazines. Few fans know about the newsletters; even fewer subscribe. The slick looking magazines seem to be wrestling's answer to *Sports Illustrated*. Given *Sports Illustrated's* recent coverage of Vince McMahon, maybe they are. One can argue that since wrestling is a work, there is no reason for the magazines to not be that way too. But reporting on a fantasy world and helping create different fantasies within that world are not exactly the same thing. These magazines go to such great extent to keep the wrestling myth alive, that to the critical eye, they can look sillier than some of the worst wrestlers on a bad day. Nonetheless, their slick packaging and photos will always help even the most outlandish stories appear to have an aura of credibility.

The Apter magazines choose to ignore many serious issues in the business that are being written about in daily newspapers throughout the country. It wasn't until the end of the steroid trial in Pennsylvania that anything on the issue was discussed in the magazines. On the heels of Magic Johnson's announcement that he has tested HIV positive, one of the latest issues has a story on AIDS. On the surface that would be laudable and responsible, but the magazine chose to write a story on this serious issues using fictitious doctors and quotes. Instead of attempting to educate, the Apter magazines chose to suppress information.

Despite their faults - and by no means are we passing judgment - these magazines do serve a useful purpose. They slowly introduce novice fans to other territories and do discuss wrestling's past. They act as free publicity for many promotions. In many cases they help in the transition from casual to hardcore fan. Few of us can claim we haven't learned something about various regions and wrestling's history through the Apter magazines. Plus the photography is top notch. Many hardcores will continue to purchase the magazines, if not for the stories, or to keep on top of wrestling's mainstream media, for the pictures alone. Still after reading some of the stories they publish, it is surprising that no one in the business has ever expressed outrage or filed a lawsuit in connection with a fictitious quote or story. But then again, a work is a work. Successfully suing TV Sports for perpetrating a work in a manner different from what was intended by the promoter would be difficult to say the least.

Obviously the magazines are a successful money making business. For that they deserve praise for successfully capitalizing on a market niche. The only argument is whether or not they have a responsibility to their readers to be truthful in their reporting. Currently the marketplace says no. Should that market change, and more fans become aware of how professional wrestling works, the Apter magazines will be forced to adapt. Perhaps they are not always responsible, but they do entertain. Given what this business is, do we really have the right to ask anything more from them?

Sidelines

Thanks To Jeff Cohen for the plug. We appreciate his support.

The Wrestling Perspective Gift Set is the perfect present for a friend. For \$5.00 your friend will receive our double Tommy Young Interview issue, the two-part Stan Lane Interview and next month's issue. This is a bargain gift you can't pass up.

Fantasy Federation is the creative publication by Jeff Cohen. Each issue features dream matches, booked by Jeff, with play by play action and the results. It's an intriguing way to be the booker for matches you want to see. He also features well informed commentary on various issues in pro wrestling. A truly unique and enjoyable publication. Plus, if you act now, for \$1 Jeff will send you his current issue and a back issue. This is a great opportunity to get a jump on Jeff's highly praised newsletter. Fantasy Federation is available from Jeff Cohen at 50 Shelly Lane, Great Neck, NY 11023 for \$1.00 an issue.

Next Month features the return of The Phantom Of The Ring with another truly insightful article that's bound to get some reader response. A great interview with Ladies Champion Rockin' Robin. Of course there will be more. It's bound to be a fantastic issue you don't want to miss. So don't. If you're subscription expires with this issue, renew today.

Of Course you've thought about submitting an article for *Wrestling Perspective* but you just didn't know what to do. Well we try to make things simple here, so this is how it works: The Wrestling Perspective Submission Manual is our guide for anyone who wants to submit feature length articles for publication. Drop us a note and we'll send you a copy. No hassles. No operated assisted calls. No worries. How can you beat it?

Letters To The Editors • Okay let's try this one more time. Last month's issue was the Letters To The Editors section with your letters. This month is the Letters To The Editors section sans reader input. Any questions?

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The Stan Lane Interview Part II

Long considered one of the top tag team wrestlers in the sport, Stan Lane has sported a combination of martial arts, solid wrestling skills, speed, agility and charisma in the ring that has made him one of the most entertaining wrestlers of the past 10 years. In part II of this interview, conducted by Paul MacArthur on October 10, 1991, Lane discusses the Turner buyout of Jim Crockett Promotions, training with Ric Flair, the current problems of the business, his future and his pastimes.

Wrestling Perspective: *When the buy out happened from Crockett to Turner, did you feel pretty safe? In retrospect, how would you describe that?*

Stan Lane: It was both good and it was also very bad. It was good in that the boys finally got hospitalization, which they needed from day one and never had. They got a lot of benefits that most normal jobs have that weren't there before. The detrimental side of it would be I think TBS, in general, knows little or nothing about the actual wrestling business. They probably tried, but they've got guys down there that are in charge of it who really don't know the best way to do things. I think they hurt the wrestling business in general by doing that.

WP: When you first left in 1989, what were the circumstances surrounding that? I know you weren't getting much attention from George Scott.

SL: Yeah, George Scott (laughs). I think George Scott's views on the business and our views were totally opposite. He didn't appreciate Jimmy's comments on the TV that everybody else loved. George Scott being from the quote "older school," which is out of touch with what needed to be done and what was successful today. So we just had a major clash from the very start.

WP: You left in the spring.

SL: Yeah, we left. When we left, George Scott got fired. I don't know if it was a direct result of our leaving, but I think we probably contributed to it. But, anyway, we quit and he was fired and they brought us back (laughs).

WP: When you came back, it seemed like they were going to put you on top. You feuded with the Freebirds for the titles and you were in the War Games and all that. Did you think things were going your way again?

SL: Yeah they were starting to look up for us. They were giving us a little bit of a looser reign to do our own thing, which I think helped. But then, I forgot who it was that came in. I think the problem was that they kept changing bosses too much. One guy would be in there for three or four months, then he would leave. Then they would bring in someone else with different ideas, different views on how the business should be run and it just kept going back and forth, see-sawing and stuff. Finally, with Ole Anderson in charge, it just got so frustrating and so fed up with it and finally push came to shove and Cornette and I walked.

WP: Cornette has pretty well documented the whole incident. Is there anything you want to add to that? Or has he pretty well summed it up?

SL: I'm sure knowing Jimmy's ability and eloquence that I'm sure that he's covered all the bases as well as anybody can do it. But just that we felt that we were being held back so much. We had all these ideas and all this talent that was just being wasted. We felt we had too much pride in our work and our ability. We were just being shackled and held back that we just finally rebelled and said, "Hey that's it. See ya!"

WP: The last match you and Bobby were to have together was the Tom Robinson Benefit. How did it feel to participate in that?

SL: Oh, we didn't mind at all. It was an honor for us to help out some guy who had watched wrestling his entire life and loved it and lived it. He had always been a big fan of ours. He'd always attend our fan parties and autograph sessions up there (Philadelphia), so we were happy to do that for him.

WP: And you got to work with Terry Funk in the process.

SL: I like Terry. I've known Terry for years and years and have always been a fan of his too. It was fun for me to get in there with him for the first time and learn from him because he's a master.

WP: What do you think is needed for WCW to get back on track, if you think that's even possible at this point?

SL: (Laughs) I'd say they've just about dug a hole so deep now. I hate to point fingers at certain people, but it seems like the decision making process that Jim Herd makes... they're always wrong. I hate to single out him, but he's, in my opinion, he's just been a very bad force for them. I'm sure he means well, but he just hasn't really got a true grasp of the business.

WP: Do you think there's anyone who could turn it around?

SL: If they would let certain people have a free reign. Yeah, probably. It might take some time. Guys like Bill Watts could probably do it. I think TBS is so involved with the

corporate structure... they've got all these channels and this send somebody a fax about this and they'll fax you back this and that. I mean there's so much red tape down there and so much bureaucracy. I think it's going to be awfully hard for anyone to go down there and get it going again.

WP: That's partially because the whole state of the business is at a bad point right now. Do you see any improvement in the near future? Or what do you think needs to be done to rebound it?

SL: Well, they say that everything goes full circle. I think it's gone about as far to the big major, national territories as it can possibly go. There's way, way too much national TV saturation. Now you can watch it Saturday or Sunday free for five or six hours. There's way, way too much of it. I think it's about time for it to go completely about face and go back to the more numerous, smaller areas and maybe just have local or even regional television.

WP: Do you think that's possible with the advent of cable? It's in about 50 percent of households now and it's going to continue to grow. Do you think it's going to be possible to go to just regionalized programs?

SL: Well, I certainly hope so. Because the way it's gotten to now, it's just (laughs) in sad shape really. They've been trying to gear it towards the kids for the past five years. In my opinion, it just hasn't worked. I think your true hardcore wrestling fan has been basically forgotten in the past five years. They're the ones that have followed it and supported it for years and years. With all these kids superhero type guys now, with the face paint and the big muscled bodies and stuff... a lot of them really aren't that great as far as being able to get out there and have a 30 or 40 minute match. So I would certainly hope that things in the future would go back to the older school of about 10 years ago.

WP: The focus more on bodybuilding as opposed to the wrestlers, per se. Searching for someone like Hogan with the build and hopefully the charisma to back it up. That's lead to the blowouts with steroid abuse within the profession. What do you think about that at this point? Do you think that's going to reverse soon or do you think it's going to cause problems for the next few years?

SL: The way the media has focused on steroid abuse in the past several years, all it would take is for one major guy to get hit once and then it's going to really spread. I think a lot of guys would be wise to, not only as far as the legality of it, but also as part of their own health, to lighten up on the stuff, or just stop it. Because, fans like to see a guy who looks good, who's in shape. But it's gotten to the point where it's ridiculous. You don't need to have veins on top of veins.

WP: You don't need to look like Lee Haney?

SL: Yeah, exactly.

WP: On the topic of steroids, it seems that some people think that's basically what you need to do to make it in this sport at this point in time. Do you think there is a pressure on wrestlers to use them at this time?

SL: Yes, yes I do. The promotions, the promoters, by their hiring practices, have made it apparent that the kind of guy they want, the kind of guys that are going to make the big bucks nowadays are the guys who look like He-Man or the Incredible Hulk or something. I think guys that have the ability to go out there and have a good match; that's been put on the backburner here lately, the past several years and the promoters are leaning more towards a guy who looks like he's a strong guy.

WP: Jim Cornette said Bobby Eaton may not draw a lot of people the first time out because he doesn't look like a bodybuilder, but the fans will come back to see him.

SL: Exactly. A lot of these guys that walk out there, they're six foot five or six, and they have muscles on top of muscles and they look like Lee Haney or whoever. Once they walk

out and all the lights are flashing and their music's playing and the crowds going crazy and stuff, everything's great. But once they walk out and they step inside the ring and the bell rings, then it's all down hill from there.

WP: Do you think the marketplace is eventually going to change that? Either through enough people demanding it and someone being smart enough to give them a product where you have a more competitive style or do you think it's going to take a major scandal where a major star is brought into light as being a steroid user and just the ill effects from that causing it to clean up?

SL: It might be scandal, but then again, from what I hear, the major companies that are showcasing those big kind of guys like that, they've been losing so much money that maybe they'll finally smarten up and realize that this isn't what's going to make us a lot of money in the long run.

WP: What are your future plans?

SL: Well, right now Jim and I are working part-time. We're working some for Global on ESPN every now and then. We're also working for Joel Goodhart up in the Philadelphia area. We're also working for three or four different regional promotions down here. So, I guess, for the time being, we're just going to do this and wait and see if we have any offers. I think Bobby just signed a contract. I think Bobby is locked up with WCW until January 1993, unless they fold in the meantime.

I've worked full-time for 12 years and never hand any real time off. So being off this past year and working part-time has been good for me. I work maybe once a week now. I've got time to work out. I've got time to travel. So it's been fun for me.

WP: How would you describe life on the road?

SL: When you work for one of the major corporations and you're under contract, you're on the road all the time. It gets a little bit old. You're in airports everyday. You get in rental cars everyday. You're in a different hotel every night. Usually, back when I was doing the last few years, my average schedule would be, maybe anywhere from 12 to 15 days in a row, I might be off one day, I'd fly back home and maybe land here in Charlotte at about noon or 1p.m. I'd do my errands, pay my bills and boom, boom, boom it was time to leave again the next morning to fly somewhere else and be gone again for 14 days. It's grueling.

WP: Are there any hobbies you do on the road? I know a lot of guys are into photography. Something to keep from going crazy?

SL: Basically women (laughs). My moniker "The Gangster of Love" I guess (laughs).

WP: Would you care to give any details?

SL: Well I better not. You know pending any legal action (laughs). Suffice to say I've enjoyed my life on the road. I've made the most of it (laughs).

WP: If either of the major organizations got in touch with you (to work) would you consider it? What would you need to go at this point?

SL: I think I would probably consider it, but I don't think Cornette would (laughs). I think Jimmy is so turned off by then that he'd just rather do this as opposed to going back and having to be a fire fighter (laughs) or the Wizard of Oz or the Red Rooster or something. I think he and I both just have too much pride to do some kind of thing like that. Even if the money was good.

WP: Basically you and Cornette would be a package deal?

SL: Yeah, I think he and I have enough respect for each other that he and I are hanging back and hoping that maybe somehow we can do something together still sometime in the future that would be good.

WP: He describe the relationship between you, him and Bobby as unique, that the three of you never get tired of each other.

SL: That's true.

WP: Do you know why that is?

SL: It's rather hard to put a finger on it. We're all three very different yet there's something there. Bobby is basically a quiet kind of guy. But a very good hearted person, who loves to laugh a lot. I'm kind of like the guy who's always playing pranks on people and stuff like that. Of course Jimmy's just a funny guy, period. So I think all the miles that we travel up and down the highways, the byways and the airways - we just always got along great.

WP: What are you doing with your spare time now?

SL: I've got a boat here that I really enjoy using a lot. I go boating a lot here in Charlotte out on Lake Wiley. I'm working out a lot now. I'm also singing some on a part-time basis with several local bands on an impromptu basis. If I'm there, they'll see me and say "We've got a special guest in the audience, Sweet Stan Lane. He's going to come up and sing a song for you." I'll go up there and sing with groups like the Catalinas, the Band of Oz, The Thames, these local beach music groups here in this area. I've been doing that a little bit. I'm also traveling a lot. Seeing my friends that I haven't seen in a long time. I've got a lot of friends in Florida, Texas and Tennessee that I haven't seen. So I'm using up my frequent flyer miles seeing them too. Basically relaxing.

WP: Do you have a trained voice?

SL: No, but I've been singing since childhood. I've just always enjoyed it. I was in a band in high school and sang with them. I'm always singing on the highway in the car. I probably drive Jimmy and Bobby crazy because I'm always singing along to the radio or a tape or something. It's not professionally trained.

WP: You mentioned boating, do you water-ski?

SL: Sure do. Water-skiing, tubing, kneeboarding. It's a lot of fun.

WP: Jumping back to the beginning of your career, what was it like to train with Ric Flair?

SL: It was tremendous for me, but it was also very, very hard. Ric was the kind of guy who really made you work as far as being in shape. He and I would get there in the morning, we'd start at about 10 in the morning and we'd workout at least three times a week. Sometimes as much as five times a week. I would drive down to Charlotte from Greensboro. At 10:00 we'd run. We'd do wind sprints. We'd do body weight squats, Hindu squats they call them. I started out I think the first day I did like 125 of them and I just fell out because they are very, very hard. It sounds easy but they're hard. By the end of the training I was doing 500 of them and then doing an extra 50 of them with 35 pound dumbbells in my hands. Ric got me in tremendous shape. Of course he and I wrestled amateur style in his grass and I'd come home with my knees and elbows all skinned and scraped. My nose would be bloodied. My lip would be busted, but I kept on coming back. I stuck it out and I made it.

WP: Get a sore chest from his chops?

SL: He wasn't doing that then. I think his chops started later on in his career, thank God.

WP: Do you still maintain a strict cardiovascular workout?

SL: Oh yeah. Where I live here, it's very hilly and I've got a mountain bike. I bike here at least three times a week, not to mention the other stuff I do - Stairmaster and stuff at the gyms. I guess one of the things I'm famous for is hardly ever sweating. I can wrestle for half an hour, sometimes 40 minutes, and I won't even be sweating hardly. I've always maintained myself in good shape. I drink minimally, maybe once every two weeks or so. I don't smoke. I don't do drugs at all. I've just always been in top shape.

WP: What's your pulse rate?

SL: I've got a very low pulse rate. Mine averages anywhere from 48 to 60 resting pulse. Very low.

WP: Are you and Flair still good friends?

SL: As a matter of fact Ric lives about three miles from my house. I'll go by there, he and I workout when he's here. He'll give me a call. He's got a great gym in his house. He's got it all. He's got a Stairmaster. He's got free weights, a Nautilus machine. I go there when I can.

WP: Is he an animal to workout with?

SL: He's in great shape. Ric is a Stairmaster freak. He's on the Stairmaster everyday of his life. Gosh, I was over there one day and he was on it for over 45 minutes. He was soaking wet. I'm not sure how many flights he did, but it had to be 1,000 maybe. He's in real good shape.

WP: What do you think of his entrance in the WWF and how that's being handled?

SL: Well, since WCW screwed him over and didn't respect him at all as far as his ability and who he is, after all he's contributed to the business over the past 15 years, he's made a smart move. He and Hulk Hogan will probably set records everywhere. They'll probably set pay-per-view records that will never be equalled. I think that is just another Jim Herd screw up.

WP: How surprising, right?

SL: No. You get used to it by now. The guys that have been misused there or just not used there at all and weren't allowed to make money. The guys that left there and went up to the WWF and made a fortune. Guys like the Undertaker. The list goes on and on. Now Ric is there and is going to do great business. So it just goes to show you...

WP: A lot of people cite when Ricky Steamboat wasn't re-signed a lot of confidence was lost in the organization. Did you feel that at the time?

SL: Yes I did. I agree with that too. Ricky is one of the great tacticians in our sport. He and Flair have had numerous classic matches. Sixty minute matches that are just classics. I mean they'll go down in the annals as being some of, if not, the greatest matches of all time. There's just another example there.

WP: What do you think of Global's potential?

SL: They're still just starting out; still a fledgling group. But just being on ESPN is fantastic. I've had more response in the past month, people saying, "Hey, I saw you on TV." Because that time slot, four to five Monday through Thursday is apparently a very widely watched time slot. That's a major network, ESPN, so hopefully he'll do well with it.

WP: Do you think there's potential with the exposure?

SL: He doesn't have the name talent down there yet, but hopefully, with guys leaving the other two major groups, he maybe able to get someone good.

WP: Jumping back to Bill Watts. What's it like to work for him and what could he add to the business?

SL: Bill Watts is a very smart man as far as the wrestling business goes. He's a very stern kind of guy. He's hard to work for in the sense that he's a very disciplined type of guy. He takes no back talk from anybody. As far as knowing the wrestling business, he's one of the great minds in the wrestling business.

WP: Who would you like to work with either in tags or against? What would you like to do goalwise right now?

SL: I've been a tag team guy for years and years and years. Even though right now I'm working mostly singles matches now. I'm a tag team kind of guy. So I would eventually like to get back into a tag team scenario with somebody. I don't really know who it is. Of course Bobby would be my primary choice, but like I told you earlier, he's contractually tied up until January, 1993. I don't know if that will be happening in the very near foreseeable future or not.

WP: Beyond Bobby, is there anyone you can think of?

SL: There's some good talent still around. But a lot it now are just big musclehead kind of guys whose style really wouldn't compliment mine. Or guys that have some goofy, wacky gimmick that I wouldn't want to be associated with either. So it kind of narrows it down (laughs).

WP: Do you think the style you have, more athletic and avoiding major gimmicks, do you see that making a comeback?

SL: I do really because I think it's gotten so ludicrous now with all the crazy kind of gimmicks you see on TV. It's gotten so crazy that I think you basic wrestling fan really misses that style where guys can go out there and have 20 or 30 minute matches and really get the crowd involved in it again as opposed to this go out there and doing your standard five to seven minute match. It's the same basic stuff every night.

WP: Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

SL: I'd say we've covered it.

WP: I can't thank you enough. I really appreciate it.

SL: My pleasure. I enjoyed it.

Ric Flair - The Next WWF Champion? Who Deserves it More... or Less?

By - Vic Stanley

In recent months, the attention of the hardcore wrestling world has been focused on Ric Flair, his seemingly single handed salvation of the WWF and his legacy in wrestling history. Most fans are skeptical that Flair will ever win the WWF title, except in the role of interim heel champion as is the WWF tradition; with Hulk Hogan eventually rising victorious with his excruciatingly inevitable face to the foot/legdrop combination. Would Flair ever allow himself to be reduced to the pathetic level of the Iron Sheik, a former interim champion who became nothing more than a jobber for Hogan, and a myriad of mid-level performers within the promotion? Would this now cliched WWF scenario elevate Flair to legendary mainstream status, which he arguably already possesses? Or would it prove to be a humiliating and anti-climatic post script in an otherwise unprecedented career of greatness? Is winning the WWF title under these circumstances in Flair's best interest?

It is assumed within some circles that Vince McMahon would never allow Hogan, his own genetic creation, to appear inferior to a rival promotion's version of the world champion. But ultimately, McMahon's primary motivation is the profit margin, and who can blame him? How many times in the past has he been able to make money and delight the hardcore fans as he is doing so successfully now? Is he a marketing genius or an opportunist? In this instance, he is a clever combination of both. Somehow, McMahon, regardless of the rancor of the hardcore fans and the nagging steroid scandals, always lands on his feet.

Who can fault him for graciously accepting what WCW offers? Flair's presence in the WWF will serve as a blood transfusion for Hulkamania, since Hogan is only as good as the opponent who carries him.

Others within the industry argue that it may be Hogan who ends up the big loser when all is said and done. He's already lost what little hardcore credibility he had with his limited wrestling skills and his contrived, albeit well coached, public stance on steroid abuse, patriotism and wholesome family living. The once sparkling Maaco paint job is beginning to crack a bit. In terms of pure wrestling skills, given the opportunity, Flair could make Hogan look very bad, thus exposing Hulkamania as myth rather than legend. The biggest mistake Flair could make would be to hold back to make a meeting with Hogan appear evenly matched. He's humiliated himself in this manner in the past and hopefully this is behind him now. But since the WWF indoctrinates its performers through humiliation of this type, anything is possible. It's rather sad to admit, but the unprecedented worldwide phenomenon of Hulkamania is gradually fading and the next generation of young fans will insist upon their own hero. It is up to McMahon to create an heir apparent. But back to the present.

With Flair now in the position to work high profile matches with Roddy Piper, Bret Hart, Ted DiBiase, Randy Savage, Tito Santana and hopefully Curt Hennig, what hardcore fan will miss Hogan if he vanishes into the world of bad B movies? Of course, McMahon's bread and butter is still the little Hulkamaniacs, but the new emphasis seems to be on actual wrestling; at least that is the perception that McMahon is attempting to convey in his recent headline matches, Sid Justice notwithstanding. The undercards are still composed of the same old over inflated, kiddie cartoon characters. Meanwhile, yesterday's Hulkamaniacs are all growing up and the market continues to evolve. As young fans grow up, they either develop into hardcore fans or they lose interest altogether. It would be in McMahon's best interest to try to retain this portion of his audience by intensifying the action. Ever the wily and crafty businessman, he currently seems willing to evolve along with this maturing audience. He possesses the vision that his competitors sadly lack. Hogan was a champion of the eighties, but this is the nineties.

Who else but Flair is currently capable of assuming Hogan's throne? Several others have the potential, but Flair is qualified right now. The WWF title is the most widely recognized and respected belt in wrestling, regardless of Jim Ross' assertions to the contrary. The more time that goes by, the more credence WCW inadvertently lends to those once reviled statement. The Ultimate Warrior is long gone. His title reign was proven to be ill advised, but McMahon did the best he could with what he had. Justice is also out of the picture, perhaps permanently now, due to a deadly combination of nagging injuries, bad attitude and an unwillingness to learn his trade. Keeping the steroid controversy in mind, the timing couldn't have been worse for a major Justice push. Perhaps McMahon realizes that now. If his true intentions are to present wrestling as more of a real sport, Justice's days are truly numbered. He is now the wrong man for the job. One thing Hogan had in his favor all these years was a sense of commitment, an attribute McMahon insists upon even more than wrestling ability. Justice looked good on paper, but McMahon will need more than a paper champion to carry him into the 21st century. All Savage wants is to get his metabolism back in order. He's had his day in the sun and who can blame him for having his priorities in order. Screwed up priorities cost Paul Orndorff, another one time WWF great, his career since he worked injured with Hogan until he could no longer perform at the level that made him a superstar. The trouble with Hogan is how do you replace an invincible god with somebody even more invincible? Who can vanquish an invulnerable god in a believable manner within the unbelievable world of wrestling?

Whatever McMahon decides to do, he must do it quickly. Flair, the great white hope of the moment, is not getting any younger. The problem is that there doesn't seem to be very many charismatic young wrestlers who are also great workers. The curse of the self-

limiting WWF mindset is beginning to haunt all of wrestling. They are caught in their own trap of image, hype and chemically induced unnatural size. It will take at least as many years to recover from the age of steroids as it did to create and proliferate it. Perhaps even longer. For the time being, I would love to see Flair become the WWF champion by winning a clean pinfall over Hogan. Deep down inside, Hogan knows Flair deserves it too. If the fans would buy Hogan taking the fall for the Warrior, why not Flair? If the Road Warriors can become triple crown winners, surely Flair is truly worthy of the honor of holding two world title belts, preferably concurrently. But it is now or never. WCW's suit over the title belt hardly picked up their sparse house shows. If anything, it triggered more resentment against them. After all, Flair is the man who helped WCW maintain some shred of credibility until his exit. Flair is now a WWF performer, but should he obtain the WWF championship, in the eyes of many, he would be the only man to hold both belts concurrently.

The irony of it all is that Lex Luger would probably make an acceptable, if not great, long range WWF champion. He's relatively young, has a WWF body, is a recognizable performer, is a good worker with the promise of improvement and has marketable charisma as long as McMahon is pulling the strings, not the WCW steering committee. McMahon would know how to push Luger. While Luger has been accused of having an attitude problem, whose fault is that? Perhaps all that Luger is lacking to become a true total package is a well guided sense of direction.

At the moment, Flair is the obvious performer who possesses all the ingredients to make up a true WWF world champion. If done correctly, he could restore a dignity and respect to the sport which has not existed since days long past when all fans were hardcore. When we are all old and gray, we'll be able to reminisce to our grandchildren that Flair was undeniably the greatest champion of all time? I hope so. Flair may not be the long term solution to McMahon's quest for a 21st century hero, but he's the best thing to happen to the WWF in a long time.

In a certain sense, the WWF is like the democratic process. It is the worst system imaginable, except for all others. If it were left up to the hardcore fans to vote for a fitting champion, Flair would be the man. Unfortunately, the WWF is a monarchy rather than a republic. We can only hope Flair will not allow himself to be exploited.

Seasons Greetings

We'd like to take this space to wish all of our readers a happy, safe and fun-filled holiday season. We'd also like to thank you for taking the time to make our publication a part of your lives. It truly is rewarding to share our thoughts and views with you and we look forward to bringing you many more issues in the months and years ahead. Best wishes for the future.

Paul & Dave

End Notes

'Remember, you only have the air to breathe and water to drink. Please take care of it. We didn't.' - James Garner

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